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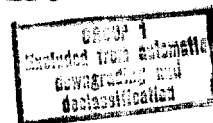
21 March 1966

MEMORANDUM: OCI/ORR Comment on General Westmoreland's Appraisal of Infiltration into South Vietnam

1. The intelligence at hand generally substantiates the conclusion in General Westmoreland's cable that the infiltration of men and materiel to South Vietnam via Laos is continuing at a heavy pace. Intelligence also indicates that this pace is likely to increase in the coming weeks prior to the advent of the monsoon, as General Westmoreland anticipates. It does not appear, however, that the Communists are presently planning an all-out maximum effort to utilize the infiltration corridor during the next few weeks. It is probable that the Communists intend to continue moving some truck traffic south in Laos during the rainy season this year, in contrast to past years.

2. During the current dry season truck traffic observed moving south from the Mu Gia Pass area through the Laotian Panhandle has averaged about 24 trucks per day on days that the road was under observation. This level of traffic is 40 percent greater than the 17 trucks per day of observation in the 1965 dry season. Due to only short periods of observation on any one route during this dry season, however, and due to the fact that the Communists now have a number of routes not

JCS review(s) completed.



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observed by road watch teams that can be used, it is believed that the total number of trucks that have moved south during this dry season probably is somewhat higher than the observed level.

3. However, the Communists could have moved more trucks south than they have, because road crews appear to have maintained the roads adequately in spite of the bombings, and plenty of trucks have been available for supply operations in the Laos-North Vietnam area. This would suggest that they may not plan an all out effort at utilization of the supply corridor during the next few weeks.

4. Based on the experience of past years the truck traffic can be expected to continue at a high level for about another 60 days during this season. In the past several years, route 23 became unpassable to truck traffic in late May. Since then, however, route 911, which appears to have been built with an all-weather capability, and bypasses to poor sections of route 23 have been constructed, and it is probable that the Communists intend to continue moving some truck traffic over these routes during the rainy season.

5. It is expected that during the coming rainy season some trucks will be able to move south from Mu Gia Pass on

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portions of routes 12 and 23 or their bypasses, on route 911, thence along route 9, and south on route 92 to at least as far as route 922, and east on route 922 to within a few miles of the South Vietnamese border. Route 922 approaches the border near the junction of Thua Thien and Quang Nam Provinces and near the former special forces camp of A Chau.

6. We would concur in general with General Westmoreland's estimate that at least 11,000 infiltrators from North Vietnam have entered South Vietnam via Laos since October 1965.

However, we have tenuous indications, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] which suggest that the total number of infiltrators since October is, in fact, considerably more than 11,000, possibly as high as 20,000. It will probably be several months, however, before sufficient intelligence is obtained to determine the actual magnitude of the movement of men South.

7. We believe the reference in the cable to the movement of some 15,000 PAVN troops into Laos by truck should be treated with reserve. [REDACTED] many of the troops pumped into Laos in this manner are deployed to assist in the maintenance of the Laotian road network. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

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8. We would concur with General Westmoreland's assessment of the present combat status of the Viet Cong/PAVN forces in South Vietnam. Although some 30 to 40 battalions of this force have suffered moderate to heavy casualties as a result of engagements this year with allied forces, the Communists still have a strong force in being. The intelligence we are receiving [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] indicates that the Communists are continuing to flesh out their organization and retrain and reequip units which have suffered combat damage with a view to making maximum use of Communist forces. This will require a continuing flow of supplies such as are now being stockpiled in South Vietnam after movement over the infiltration corridor.